

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

**The Sacred Month of Muharram: Introduction;  
Fasting During this Month; The Day of Ashura (10th  
Muharram); Misconceptions and Innovations;  
Lamentations and Mourning**

**(i) Introduction**

Muharram is the first month of the Hijri Calendar. It is one of the four sacred months about which the Qur'an says: ***“Indeed, the number of months with Allah is twelve (lunar) months in the register of Allah (from) the day He created the heavens and the earth; of these, four are sacred.”*** [The Qur'an 9:36]

These four months, according to the authentic Ahadeeth, are Dhul-Qadah, Dhul-Hijjah, Muharram and Rajab. All the interpreters of the Qur'an are unanimous on this point, because the Prophet (ﷺ) declared in his last sermon on the occasion of his pilgrimage to Makkah: ***“The year is of twelve months, out of which four months are sacred: Three are in succession Dhul-Qa'da, Dhul-Hijjah and Muharram, and (the fourth is) Rajab of (the tribe of) Mudar which comes between Jumadi-ath-Thaniyah and Sha'ban.”*** [Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Hadeeth 3197]

The specific mention of these four months does not mean that any other month has no sanctity, because the month of Ramadan is admittedly the most sacred month in the year. But these four months were specifically termed as sacred months for the simple reason that even the pagans of Makkah accepted their sacredness, and the sacredness of these four months was established right from the day Allah created the universe. Since

the pagans of Makkah attributed themselves to Ibraaheem (Abraham), peace be upon him, who observed the sacredness of these months; they also observed the sacredness of these four months and despite their frequent tribal battles, they held it unlawful to fight in these months. In Islam, the sanctity of these months was upheld and the Qur'an referred to them as the 'sanctified months'.

## **(ii) Fasting During this Month**

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: ***“The most excellent fast after Ramadan is Allah's month, al-Muharram.”***

[Saheeh Muslim, Hadeeth 2755, 2756]

Even though the fast during the month of Muharram is not obligatory, one who fasts these days out of his own will is entitled to a great reward from Allah. The Hadeeth cited above signifies that fasting in the month of Muharram is the most rewardable among voluntary fasting. It does not mean that the award promised for the fast of Muharram can be achieved only by fasting for the whole month. On the contrary, fasting any day during this month has its merits. Therefore, one should avail of this opportunity as much as he can.

## **(iii) The Day of Ashura (10th Muharram)**

Although Muharram is a sacred month as a whole, yet the 10th day of Muharram (Ashura) is the most sacred among all its days. It is narrated by Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him: When the Prophet (ﷺ) arrived at Medina he found that the Jews observed

fast on the day of Ashura. They were asked the reason for the fast. They replied, ***“This is the day when Allah caused Moses and the children of Israel to have victory over Pharaoh, so we fast on this day as a sign of glorifying it.”*** Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, ***“We are closer to Moses than you. Then he ordered that fasting on this day should be observed.”*** [Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Hadeeth 3943] It is also reported in a number of authentic Ahadeeth that in the beginning, fasting on the day of Ashura was obligatory for the Muslims. It was later that the fast of the month of Ramadan was made obligatory and the fast on the day of Ashura was made optional. It is narrated by Aaishah, may Allah be pleased with her: The (tribe of) Quraysh used to fast on the day of Ashura in the Jaahiliyyah (the pre-Islamic period of Ignorance), and then Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) ordered (Muslims) to fast on it till the fasting in the month of Ramadan was prescribed; whereupon the Prophet (ﷺ) said, ***“He who wants to fast (on Ashura) may fast, and he who does not want to fast may not fast.”*** [Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Hadeeth 1893]

There is no contradiction between this Hadeeth and the previous one since both the Jews and the pagan Quraysh used to fast this day, although their reasons might have been different while the time being the same, from the Days of Ignorance till the time after Hijrah. It is recommended to fast the ninth and tenth of Muharram together, as the Prophet (ﷺ) fasted the tenth and intended to fast the ninth the next year in case he remained in this world [Saheeh Muslim, Hadeeth 2666, 2667].

#### **(iv) Misconceptions and Innovations**

There are some legends and misconceptions with regard to Ashura that have managed to find their way into the minds of the

unlearned, but have no support of authentic Islamic sources; some very common of them are these:

- This is the day on which Aadam, peace be upon him, was created.
- This is the day when Ibraheem, peace be upon him, was born.
- This is the day when Allah accepted the repentance of Aadam, peace be upon him.
- This is the day when the Day of Judgment will take place.
- Whoever takes a bath on this day will never get ill.

All these and other similar whims and illusions are totally baseless and the narrations referred to in this respect are not authentic at all. Some people take it as Sunnah to prepare a particular type of meal on this day. This practice has also no basis in the authentic Islamic sources.

Some other people attribute the sanctity of Ashura to the martyrdom of Al-Husayn, may Allah be pleased with him. No doubt, the martyrdom of Al-Husayn, may Allah be pleased with him, is one of the most tragic episodes of our history. Yet, the sanctity of Ashura cannot be ascribed to this event for the simple reason that the sanctity of Ashura was established much earlier during the days of the Prophet (ﷺ). On the contrary, it is one of the merits of Al-Husayn, may Allah be pleased with him, that his martyrdom took place on this blessed day.

Another misconception about the month of Muharram is that it is an evil or unlucky month, for Al-Husayn, may Allah be pleased with him, was killed in it. It is for this misconception that some people avoid holding marriage ceremonies in the month of Muharram. This is again a baseless concept, which is contrary to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ). If the death of an eminent person on a particular day renders that day unlucky for all times to come, then one can hardly find a day of

the year free from this bad luck because every day is associated with the demise of some eminent people, such as, the Sahabah like Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, and others, may Allah be pleased with them all. The Qur'an and the Sunnah have liberated us from such superstitious beliefs.

## **(v) Lamentations and Mourning**

Another wrong practice related to this month is to hold lamentation and mourning ceremonies in the memory of the martyrdom of Al-Husayn, may Allah be pleased with him. As mentioned earlier, the event of Karbala is one of the most tragic events of our history, but the Prophet (ﷺ) has forbidden us from holding such mourning ceremonies on the death of any person. The people of Jaahiliyyah (the pre-Islamic period of Ignorance) used to mourn over their deceased through loud lamentations, by tearing their clothes and beating their cheeks and chests.

The Prophet (ﷺ) prevented the Muslims from doing all this and directed them to observe patience and say Inna lillaahi Wa Inna Ilayhi Raaji'oon (Verily, to Allah we belong, and indeed, to Him we shall return). A number of authentic Ahadeeth are available on the subject, such as, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, ***“He is not from us who slaps his checks, tears his clothes and cries in the manner of the people of Jaahiliyyah.”*** [Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Hadeeth 1297] All the prominent jurists are unanimous on the point that the mourning of this type is impermissible. Every Muslim should avoid this practice and abide by the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

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